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ABSTRACT

To avoid the demise of adolescent literature, educators must revise their way of thinking to include a great many paperback media tie-in books in the English curriculum. Among the possible reasons many teachers have thus far neglected media tie-ins are their beliefs that the tie-ins are inferior literature or that they are just another gimmick. Other teachers may be afraid of being censured by parents or may even be unaware of the existence of these books because of their suppression by book clubs. Another reason may be the tendency to return to hardcover anthologies that are more "respectable." Nevertheless, previous studies have shown that students will read media tie-ins when their interests are stimulated by the media. They also have shown that television, movies, and even the promotion of television and movies functioned as motivators for voluntary adolescent reading. In spite of this interest in media-related books, school book clubs still have forced-choice selection that exclude media tie-ins. Furthermore, few if any media-related books are advertised in professional publications or exhibited at conferences and conventions of English or reading teachers. Now is a good time to revive literature education to include media tie-ins since television and movie novels whet the interests of the students and provide content for all levels of readers. Second, television and film direct more attention to adaptations of adolescent fiction, thereby extending the potential for multimedia literature study. (HOD)

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ADOLESCENT LITERATURE IN THE AGE OF AQUARIUS

by
Harlan Hamilton

A year ago, January 1981 to be exact, an article called "Literature in Crisis" appeared in the ENGLISH JOURNAL. The article, written by Edmund J. Farrell of the University of Texas, Austin, told about some frightening things happening in adolescent literature. For example, between May and June 1978, the research firm of Yankelovich, Skelly and White conducted "The Consumer Study on Reading and Book Purchasing," involving 1450 one-hour interviews of "a representative sample of the general United States Public" age sixteen and over in 165 cities. Interviewers found that non-book readers totaled 39% of the population; of that group, 68% had not read a book in five or more years. Susan Wagner, in the November 6, 1978 issue of PUBLISHERS WEEKLY concluded "...that if people do not acquire the book reading habit by the time they graduate from high school, they never will."

But that is not all. Dr. Farrell went on to tell us how Americans continue to prefer viewing over reading (nothing really new). When pitted against television, newspapers and magazines fare poorly. During the past decade, the Roper Organization has found that the majority of adults polled cite television as their primary source of news (again, nothing especially new). When asked which source they find most credible--magazines, newspapers or television--they chose television by margins as wide

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as 2.5 to one over newspapers and 5.5 to one over magazines.

In addition, Professor Farrell notes, the use of paperbacks is diminishing in the schools in favor of hardback anthologies. Not only are anthologies durable and reasonably inexpensive, they are a more ostensible manifestation of a tradition to which tax payers wish the schools to return. Also, says Farrell, since the 1974 uprising in Kanawaka County, West Virginia, over textbooks that were allegedly profane and un-American, most educational publishers have directed their editors to avoid materials potentially controversial because of either language or subject matter.

Finally, Dr. Farrell believes that the censure tactics of Norma and Mel Gabler of Longview, Texas have had a "chilling effect" on classrooms across the nation, having successfully created by their attacks an atmosphere in which many English teachers will teach nothing but "sanitized" literature. All of these events spell bad news for adolescent literature from my point of view, more of which later.

Edmund Farrell stepped into the limelight (from my point of view) once again with the April 1981 issue of the ENGLISH JOURNAL. In that issue, in the section called "Bait/Rebait," he notes that there is little evidence to support the argument that mass culture debases standards or vulgarizes tastes. Instead, as Russell B. Nye observes in THE UNEMBARRASSED MUSE: THE POPULAR ARTS IN AMERICA (Dial Press, 1970, p. 420), "...it has become more reasonable to view the arts as one long continuum, to consider all levels of artistic accomplishment as related rather than disparate."

Popular culture, Professor Farrell continues, exists whether or not we subject it, in all its diversities and incongruities, to critical examination in the classroom. Persuasive in its influence, it represents a non-academic curriculum that has more bearing on the attitudes, tastes, values, aspirations, and commitments of adolescents than has any literature we may teach, says Farrell. Because most of the products of popular culture are intensely commercial, they appeal to our desire for glamour, excitement, love, prestige, affluence, and security. These appeals are most often transmitted through language--printed, spoken, or pictorial. And since laguage in all its forms and uses should be central to English studies, the study of popular culture is thus relevant to the English classroom.

Dr. Farrell concludes his comments by telling us, as Marshall McLuhan did in 1964, that most classrooms remain sanctuaries of print culture, anachronistic relics of a pre-electronic environment. If secondary English is currently languishing, it is largely a consequence of ignoring the non-print media and its off-shoots, Farrell admonishes us. The point is that if adolescents learn to evaluate judiciously the values celebrated by the culture and the media which communicate these values, they may be freed of whatever hold these values have upon them.

An article which echoes Professor Farrell's thoughts appeared on the Fall 1981 issue of TC TODAY, the newsletter

of Teachers College, Columbia University. In "TC Psychologist Alerts Schools to 'Electronic Learning Age,'" Mary Alice White, professor of psychology and education at Teachers College (and director of the Electronic Learning Laboratory at the College as well as the coordinator of the College's program in educational psychology), tells us that television is so effective in teaching children with images that most six-year-olds are baffled when the school tries to tell them how to learn from print. Educators must recognize, she says, that outside the classroom the "Print Learning Age" is ending. Only four hundred years after the invention of the printing press made mass literacy possible, new technology is changing how people receive information.

The written word still must be taught in the "Electronic Learning Age," and this teaching, Professor White asserts, further distinguishes print learning from electronic learning. which is almost always accomplished without a teacher, a school, or effort. Television, for instance, has taught children that "learning is entertaining, that it is immediate, and that it is fun," she explains, but the print learning that follows in school is hard work.

Despite children's difficulty with the printed word, most teachers are more comfortable with the written word than with the image, according to Professor White. Teachers do watch television (even the ones who say they don't), but most of them tend to be "print people" by virtue of their own print education and affinity for schooling, she explains. Moreover, they draw

upon a pedagogy developed largely through the study of how children learn from and with words; image learning raises new questions for educators.

Teachers must, Dr. White is convinced, stop fighting the new technology and start learning how it works. She advises educators to:

1. Recognize that they are competing with music, sound effects, and technical effects--"everything technology has come up with to keep children's eyes glued to the television screen."
2. Study electronic learning (which refers to microprocessors, electronic games, computer programs, cable, and video discs, as well as television) to see what teachers can use as a bridge to print learning.

A third person in the fall of 1981 had some things to say about adolescent literature in the age of Aquarius. This time the comments came from a layman, Fred M. Hechinger who, in his article in THE NEW YORK TIMES (December 8, 1981, p. C5), "Reading: Don't Blame Teachers," said that although reading scores are improving in elementary schools across the country, teenagers' reading skills continue to slip as well as their interest in reading.

In his article, Mr. Hechinger quotes Richard C. Anderson, director of the Center for the Study of Reading at the University of Illinois, as saying that many of the methods now being used to

teach reading are simplistic and many of the materials children are given to read are boring....If things turn out badly, he adds, don't blame the teachers, blame the methods and materials.

There is, Mr. Anderson says, a dearth of interesting in-school reading material. Books are adapted not written. They adhere to so-called "reading ability formulas" with only simple words and short sentences. Such an approach not only makes reading in school less interesting but fails to prepare children to cope with "real" books. In such books, Mr. Anderson complains, "there are few complexities of plot. The stories are artificial and colorless. Style has been bled away."

After the initial excitement of learning to read in the first years of school, continues Anderson, reading suddenly becomes dull business. With the lure of television and the lack of training in how to distill meaning from the printed page, fewer junior and senior high school students "get any real pleasure out of reading on their own." And parents have long believed that their children's first excursions into reading in school too often take them into that barren territory of "basal readers," devoid of fun, excitement and challenge which results in a loss of interest in reading.

Everything which has been written up to now are but prefaces to the main theme of this article--the use of media tie-in books as a way to get kids interested in books and reading.

A year before (December 1980 to be exact) these eminent people published their observations on this critical period in adolescent literature, I had an article published in VOICE OF YOUTH ADVOCATES which revealed some interesting data. The article, "Media Tie-ins: Where Electronic and Stone Ages Clash," is pertinent, I think, to my discussion here. The article was based upon a nationwide survey of 307 schools (122 junior high schools, 113 senior high schools, and 72 independent schools) in 1979.

Some of the quotes from the survey are worth repeating:

> "Students usually ask for books related to TV programs. It does not matter if the book is lengthy or difficult reading."
>
> --Librarian, King Jr. High Schl., Portland, Me.

> "...For those who are average readers up to avid, TV stimulates reading instead of reducing it."
> --Librarian, Vail Jr. High School, Tucson, AZ

> "Anything on television sells. There is a definite relation to sales and what appears on television. Anything that appears on television will stimulate orders for books. The greater percentage of books sold are related to media. Nine out of ten times kids will pick media tie-ins."
> --Ed James, Bookmobile, Inc., Bergenfield, N.J.

"If a story is on TV one night, I am swamped with requests for the book the next day."
--Librarian, Academy High School, Erie, PA

To one of the questions in my survey- "Do your students read books based upon such popular television series as STAR TREK, BATTLE STAR GALACTICA, WILDERNESS FAMILY, MORK AND MINDY, and THE INCREDIBLE HULK?"--62% of the junior high schools answered "yes," 60% of the senior high schools answered "yes," and 17% of the independent schools replied "yes."

In my article I quote Professor Michael Angelotti of Texas Technical University who, in the Fall 1979 issue of ALAN REVIEW, says that to revive literature education in this country will require a revolution. Now is a good time for this revolution, according to Dr. Angelotti, for two reasons, because we have certain advantages not available to past reform movements: television and movie novels to whet interest and to provide content for all levels of readers. Second, television and film are directing more attention to adaptations of adolescent fiction, extending potential for multi-media literature study.

In my article I mention also my doctoral study at Boston University, which was reported in the ARIZONA ENGLISH BULLETIN for April 1976, of the reading interests of 253 seventh grade boys and girls in a suburban New Jersey town in 1971. My study showed that the seventh grade pupils spent three times as much time watching television as they did reading books. However,

when given the opportunity to read TV tie-ins (books which I supplied through the generosity of publishers) related to their favorite television series, my study showed that certain children will read when their interests are stimulated by the media, particularly television. Specifically, my study showed:

1. TV tie-ins were effective in promoting an interest in reading among pupils from a low socioeconomic group and with a low IQ.
2. A pupil who spent much time watching television was inclined to read TV tie-ins.
3. The reading habits of boys were more influenced by television than were the reading habits of girls.
4. Girls from a low socioeconomic group tended to read more TV tie-ins than boys from this same group, but boys with a low IQ from this group read more TV tie-ins than did the girls with a low IQ.
5. No pupil believed TV tie-ins were difficult to read.

(in an age of formulas)

This data suggests the formula R=M+B, that is, reading will occur when young people are given books related to their favorite media (in this case, television) offerings.

Also as part of my 1979 survey, I asked publishers for a list of their best-selling titles for 1978-9 in the junior and senior high school market. Of the twenty-six titles New American Library listed as popular, six were media related: I NEVER PROMISED YOU A ROSE GARDEN, KRAMER VS, KRAMER, ONE FLEW OVER

THE CUCKOO'S NEST, TRUE GRIT, CARRIE, and SALEM'S LOT. Of the twenty titles Ballentine-Vintage Books submitted, six were also media related: DAWN: PORTRAIT OF A TEENAGE RUNAWAY (TV), SARAH T.: PORTRAIT OF A TEENAGE ALCOHOLIC (TV), STAR WARS, LORD OF THE RINGS, THE HOBBIT, and ROCKY. Xerox submitted fifteen popular titles, six of which were media tie-ins: I WANT TO KEEP MY BABY (TV), ONE ON ONE, CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND, GREASE, SOONER OR LATER (TV), and THE AMITYVILLE HORROR. Out of the eighteen titles for Scholastic, six were related to films: THE AMITYVILLE HORROR, GREASE, IF I EVER SEE YOU AGAIN, HEAVEN CAN WAIT, HOOPER, and INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS. Fawcett noted there was a resurgence of interest in the book ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT after Richard Thomas starred in the November 1979 television special. No "classics" appeared on any of the lists. At this point, I asked myself, "Why is it that ~~none~~ few of these titles (especially the TV tie-ins) ever appear in young adult literature polls or in advertisements in professional journals or at the book exhibits of conferences attended by English and reading teachers?"

Nicholas P. Criscuolo, in his pamphlet, "You Can Use Television to Stimulate Your Child's Reading Habits" (Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, n.d.) corroborates my findings just noted when he says that television can also serve as a springboard to reading. For example, a child who sees a movie about Helen Keller, or a program about the life of Albert Schweitzer, may be inspired to read about them. This is

especially true, Mr. Criscuolo continues, for children in the 10-to-12 year-old range, a key period, since reading habits which extend into adulthood are being formed at this time. He notes that books, magazines, and other reading material will probably be read more avidly by children when they can relate them to characters and themes shown on television.

And Tony Schwartz, in THE RESPONSIVE CHORD (Anchor Books, 1974), adds that the media child enters school closely united to his fellow students by a common experience of the world which results from their common use of the media. He can fill in, or respond to, or resonate with a vast amount of information that he shares with others in the class. Also, according to Schwartz, children will make senses of new experiences by referring them to common previous experiences. This information, common to all children who grow up with electronic media, is the greatest teaching resource available to an educator, but he must know how to use it.

Mr. Schwartz continues by noting that a teacher's classroom input can bring to mind those things a student has seen or heard before and place it in a new context that serves an educational purpose. From this perspective, television becomes a valuable reading readiness tool. The teacher can design reading materials, suggests Schwartz, that utilize a child's media experience. These experiences are the same for all children in the classroom, Schwartz maintains, and they can be

known by the teacher before he or she ever meets the children.

A concluding study worth mentioning, since it relates to everything I have said here and is similar to my doctoral study of nine years earlier, is Warren E. Mason, Jr.'s doctoral study, "The Effects of the Synergistic Relationship of the Mass Media and Tie-in Novels Upon Adolescent Reading Interests" (Boston University, 1980). In his study, Dr. Mason used one hundred eighth grade pupils (26 boys, 74 girls), mainly thirteen and fourteen year-olds. He also interviewed five booksellers who had most contact with the study's population. The main points of his study, which should interest all English teachers, follow.

First of all, the great majority of pupils in the study read books about favorite types of television shows and movies; also, the majority read direct television and movie tie-in books. When given three choices of influence on reading, they reported movies and television as their choices after friends. The booksellers reported that 40% of all books bought by adolescents were media tie-ins. They also said that when a book became a TV show or movie, sales "dramatically" increased. The booksellers thought that television and movies greatly influence adolescent reading choices, Mason tells us, and that this influence was translated into medie tie-in sales. They also thought that advertising and promotion for television shows and movies motivated student media tie-in purchases.

Secondly, there is a definite relationship between television and movies viewed and books (both direct media tie-ins and books related to viewing) read, indicating that television, movies and the promotion of them functioned as a motivator for voluntary adolescent reading. James A. Alcott (as quoted in Mason's study, p. 77), publisher of HARPER'S MAGAZINE for thirty years, admitted in an article,"Harper's Publisher Sees Reading Being Lost Art" (NASHUA TELEGRAPH, Nashua, New Hampshire, March 25, 1978, p. 14) ....that television and movies directly contribute to the most successful books, whether tie-ins or not, and that they gain their popularity from film and television programs like JAWS and ROOTS. He observed that: "Reading preferences are influenced more and more by television...TV started as an educational medium, is now perceived as an entertainment medium, but it actually is an advertising medium."

In Mason's study media tie-ins accounted for 17% of the students' total voluntary book reading in a six-month period. Only 17% of the students said that their favorite books never had anything to do with television or movies. And nearly one quarter of the females reported that their favorite books usually had to do with television or movies. More than half the population could name a specific, non-weekly television program that made them "want" to read the tie-in book, and 40% of the students went on to voluntarily read the TV tie-in book. Also, 84% of the students could name a specific movie that made them want to read the tie-in book, and 78% of them went on to read the movie tie-in book. In addition, over 40% of the total population could name a subject-related book that they sought out and read

because of a specific film. Their top four movies and television shows correlated with the top books they later sought out and read voluntarily.

Mason concluded that certain types of young adult novels--media tie-ins in particular--motivate the voluntary reading of adolescents. Movies and television programs provide a particular form of motivation that stimulates adolescents to seek out and read tie-in novels related to the shows that interest them. Furthermore, according to Mason, almost 60% of the students read TV tie-in books, and 80% of them read movie tie-in books. They expressed very strong interest in reading books about their favorite television shows and movies by 3 - 1 and 7 - 1 respectively. Over 60% of the population said that when they browsed for books (mostly in book stores), they were most likely to stop and look at a book if it had a media-related cover. And paperbacks remained the favorites of students over hardcover books. Most of the students said they didn't use their local public library.

Booksellers, Dr. Mason continues, reported that about 20% of their customers are adolescents, that 95% of the books they buy are paperbacks and that 40% of these are media tie-ins. Thus, media tie-ins have to be regarded as one of the most purchased (and hence popular) type of book favored by adolescents, a point that checks with my study in 1971. The booksellers unanimously thought, Mason reports, that television and films influence adolescents' choice of reading material and that (by 8 - 1) this influence was translated into sales of media

at the spring meeting of the New Jersey Reading Association (or at the New York City Association of Teachers of English conference the same week) in March 1982. Also, the "Books for Young Adults Poll" which appeared in the November 1980 ENGLISH JOURNAL did not list a single media tie-in--a totally unrealistic picture of current adolescent tastes, from my point of view, and a throw-back to pre-television days.

This apparent lack of interest in media tie-ins, especially since Paul Witty's research dating back to 1964 has proven their viability, caused me to ponder educators' indifference to them. I offer the following possible reasons for their neglect in addition to the ones alluded to in this article:

1. Media (especially TV) tie-ins are inferior literature.
2. English teachers are afraid of being censured by parents.
3. Media tie-ins are just another gimmick to get kids reading (as an educator from Iowa once told me).
4. Ignorance--many English teachers are unaware of their existence, because of their suppression by book clubs.
5. The tendency to return to hardcover anthologies which are more "respectable."

I believe that what the Commission on English of the College Entrance Examination Board in 1965 said about "adolescent novels" or "junior novels" can apply equally well to media tie-ins today.

In FREEDOM AND DISCIPLINE IN ENGLISH (p. 49), the Committee said:

> Claims are frequently advanced for the use of so-called 'junior books,' a 'literature of adolescence,' on the ground that they ease the young readers into a frame of mind in which he will be ready to tackle something stronger, harder, more adult. The Commission has serious doubt that it does anything of the sort. For classes in remedial reading a resort to such books may be necessary, but to make them a considerable part of the curriculum for most students is to subvert the purpose for which literature is included in the first place.

In summary, it seems clear to me after the discussion here that if we wish to avoid the demise of adolescent literature in the 1980's and beyond, we as educators on all levels, whether we like it or not, are going to have to revise our thinking about what young people will be permitted to read in the schools. Our new way of thinking, from my point of view again, certainly should include a great many paperback media tie-in books in the English curriculum.